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**AFTER-HOURS REFORMS WILL BETTER TARGET SERVICES FOR PATIENTS**

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said today that the Government’s much-needed reforms to after-hours primary care should ensure that after-hours GP services are better targeted towards patients with genuine clinical need.

Dr Gannon said the changes to Medicare funding for after-hours GP services, provided through approved medical deputising services (AMDSs), include a commitment from the Government to reinvest savings into improving services and to continue to work with the AMA on longer-term after-hours care reforms.

“Access to after-hours GP services is a critical part of our health system,” Dr Gannon said.

“But poor models of after-hours GP care can fragment patient care, result in poorer outcomes for patients, and burden the health system with additional costs.

“The reforms announced today should help address these problems.

“Many families depend on after-hours services, but they should not be seen as a substitute for a visit to a patient’s usual GP.

“If a patient can wait until the next day to see their usual GP, or attend their usual general practice, that is the best option.

“A patient’s usual GP will be able to provide more comprehensive care – with immediate access to the patient’s history and a better understanding of the patient’s health care needs for things like allergies or medications.”

The Government has addressed concerns raised by the AMA by:

- strengthening AMDS triaging protocols,
- strengthening the link between AMDSs and a patient’s usual general practice; and
- stopping direct to consumer advertising, which was often misleading.

Dr Gannon said it is critical that after-hours GP care service providers, particularly those that operate exclusively in the after-hours period, adopt a collaborative model that complements the care provided by a patient’s usual GP, or through their regular general practice.

“This package of reforms is clearly designed to encourage this high quality model of care,” Dr Gannon said.

“Today’s reforms follow a period of constructive discussions between the AMA and Minister Hunt and consideration of the findings of the MBS Review Taskforce’s report on urgent after-hours services.

“But there is still work to do.

“The Government has agreed to explore a more robust and sustainable funding model for AMDs, which builds on the MBS Review Taskforce report, and which is linked to robust quality standards.

“We understand that the Government is committed to re-investing savings into improved services.

“It is critical that this funding stays in general practice.

“Along with the development of a new funding model for AMDs, the AMA has put forward other recommendations, including additional funding for the Practice Incentive Program (PIP) and for wound care in general practice.”

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